

VZCZCXRO7650
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHDJ #0518 1641412
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 121412Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9305
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA

S E C R E T DJIBOUTI 000518

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/EX
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/12/2013
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [MOPS](#) [PHSA](#) [ER](#) [AU](#) [DJ](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: FONMIN APPRECIATIVE

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. KATHLEEN LIST FOR REASONS
1.4 (B) & (D).

¶1. (C) Chargee attended the Russian National Day celebration June 11 and spoke with numerous diplomats, all of whom seemed unaware that anything more serious than two dead in a Djiboutian skirmish with the Eritrean military at the border had occurred.

¶2. (C) Upon return to the Embassy, CDA called Djiboutian Foreign Minister Mahamoud Ali Youssouf (21:45 local time) and asked if Djibouti was preparing a declaration of war, as has been rumored in the city. He said Djibouti did not declare war on Eritrea; Eritrea invaded Djibouti and Djibouti was defending itself. He observed that the mismatch in military strength was significant, with the Djiboutian military numbering 3000 while the Eritrean numbered over 100,000 in total and was throwing massive numbers of men into the fight at the border. He said fighting had continued almost constantly since the previous evening, with a slight lull in the afternoon of June 11. He stressed the need for the international community to intervene immediately to stop the Eritrean "militias" and bring the Eritrean government to the negotiating table so it could explain exactly what the problem is that Eritrea has with Djibouti that would occasion such violence.

¶3. (C) The minister said he had a meeting scheduled with the Arab League June 12 in the morning and a 2 p.m. meeting with the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. He is in constant contact with his UN Ambassador. CDA told him about the USG statement of support for the Djiboutian position and calling for the two countries to sit down at the negotiating table. The Minister seemed most relieved to hear this, as he had not seen the statement. (Post sent a hard copy to the Foreign Ministry on June 12.)

¶4. (C) He then mentioned that Deputy Chief of Defense MG Zakaria Cheikh Ibrahim (the CHOD, MG Fathi A. Houssein, is reportedly at the Presidential Palace) had overflown the battlefield at the border inside Djibouti proper June 11 and that many Eritrean soldiers were dead on Djiboutian soil. The RSO's office reports that the remaining 25% of the Djiboutian military left Djibouti city the morning of June 11, meaning there are no or few Djiboutian military in the capital city. An unknown number of police officers are following to the front. The military is calling up all who retired from the military in the last four years and suggested any male over 18 should be prepared to protect his country. The Minister insisted again that Djibouti was defending its territory, not attacking another state.

¶5. (C) The Minister expressed his appreciation to the United States and encouraged us to "provoke" a prompt end to the

fighting and a move to the negotiating table. Djibouti is prepared to work directly with the Eritreans or engage a third party mediator.

16. (S) COMMENT: The fighting has already provoked an increased flow of malnourished Djiboutian rural nomads/dwellers, especially from the drought-plagued northeast Afar-speaking area, into the capital city. This combines with the diminution of remittances to rural dwellers from their urban family members, due to the rise in gas and food prices and diminished disposable income. The result is a capital with an abundance of nomads and new faces, presenting a possible opportunity for destabilizing individuals to move freely and opportunistically throughout the city. Post does not believe, however, that there is an immediate or adverse impact to daily life in the capital. Security, by all accounts, remains intact. Even though reports confirm an increased presence of police and gendarmerie support on the border, there has been no visible decrease in security within the city. Post is closely monitoring any changes that may affect Mission operations.
END COMMENT.
LIST